

## COVID-19: Guidance for Safely Resuming Group Music-making in Church

**UPDATE: 12<sup>th</sup> November** *(highlights show the changes since the last edition).*

The following information and FAQs relate to the period 5<sup>th</sup> November to 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2020. They are based on the guidance from the Government in Westminster, and not arrangements for devolved administrations. Separate information for these parts of the UK are on our website; this set of guidance notes has taken the Church of England as the guiding 'church' context.

**It is vital to remember that the core regulation is to Stay at Home where possible; anything else is an exception to this. The intention is that a strong set of actions now mean that the long-term future for the enablement of music in worship remains positive.**

The two key pieces of government regulations are:

Relating to broadcast worship, from MHCLG:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july>

and for formal school settings:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>

from which decisions can be made, referencing local factors and situations.

**The responsibility for these decisions rests at local level – Chapters/PCCs, incumbents and churchwardens. The RSCM is not itself responsible for the implementation of these guidance notes; and the spirit underpinning all your decision making should be one of reasonableness and responsibility.**

**The information below covers the situation from the start of the National Lockdown until 2<sup>nd</sup> December in England.**

A summary of the current situation with relation to worship within the Church of England is:

- There are no gathered congregations currently permitted, other than for funerals.
- In a parish context, it may be appropriate to consider the use of a single cantor and/or organist in streamed/broadcast worship as some of those 'essential to worship' – see FAQs below.

- Cathedral choirs and others which can reasonably describe their singing as work (ie **professionally-based**) are able, in principle, to continue singing and rehearsing (but see also FAQ#5 below).
- These guidelines are based on a concept of permissiveness rather than prescription; they should be read in the spirit of the concept of the lockdown – i.e. trying to take all possible steps to minimise the possibility of infection, including the local decision of whether it is right to meet together at all during this period.

See below for more information in the FAQs

Please also refer to the RSCM's webpage for all our Covid-19 resources:

<https://www.rscm.org.uk/covid-19-resources-for-churches/>

PLEASE read the document first, but if you have any subsequent questions, please email [enquiries@rscm.com](mailto:enquiries@rscm.com); we will post questions and the appropriate replies in a page on the RSCM website.

#### **FAQs:**

1. **So can we have choir practice as usual during the lockdown?** *Not in person, unless you are a choir who can reasonably describe themselves as professional – ie it is work, not a leisure/extra-curricular activity. Think about how to keep your rehearsals as efficient as possible and consider how you can continue to use technology to rehearse the music in advance via online methods.*

**Rehearsals should take place within the place of worship for any choir over 6 in number – not in buildings which fall outside the church footprint (e.g. a church hall or community facility)**

2. **How many can be in the choir?** *This will be informed by your own local risk assessment of space available (following 2m between singers). Good ventilation and duty of care towards singers are both essential. There is therefore no concrete answer to this question. Again, please refer to Government guidance on a safe return to singing for professional and non-professional choirs.*

Singers should not socially mix; this includes before and after rehearsals and services.

3. **Can concerts/recitals take place in church?** *Guidance on this is currently being drafted.*
4. **Can we use a cantor in leading our worship?** *MHCLG guidance allows the use of a singer where this is an essential part of the worship.*
5. **Can children sing?** *Department for Education out-of-school guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/education-and-childcare-settings-new-national-restrictions-from-5-november-2020#ooss>) makes it clear that 'All other out of school activities, not being primarily used by parents for these purposes [to enable parents to*

*work or undertake training], should close for face-to-face provision for the duration of the national restrictions'. This means that choirs which recruit from multiple schools will be unable to meet this month; we recognise that many will find this disappointing news.*

6. **With choristers (children), how far do bubbles need to distance?** *Churches with Choir Schools may be able to utilise similar protocols relating to 'bubbles' (defined groups) from school. In other scenarios it is advised that all singers observe 2m distance.*
7. **Within a bubble, how far apart to singers need to be?** *In a choir school setting, where the choristers are in a 'bubble' in the school environment, social distancing between members of the same 'bubble' may be relaxed, including when singing within the bubble, in the same way that social distancing may be relaxed in the school environment in situations where full social distancing is not possible. Please see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools#section-1-public-health-advice-to-minimise-coronavirus-covid-19-risks> and <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts>*
8. **I don't have any 'bubbles' (consistent, school-based groups of children) in my choir. How far apart should the singers be?** *Again, a cautious approach would suggest at least 1 metre with mitigations (e.g. not singing 'at' each other but singing in a straight line facing forwards and 2 metres from people in front of them).*
9. **If someone is ill and potentially diagnosed with COVID, does all the choir have to isolate?** *As a group activity that may carry higher risk, it is essential that choirs make full use of the T+T system. In consequence, it is essential that all choirs keep secure records of attendance and contact details. If any choir member falls ill and is tested positive, Track and Trace will contact every other member of the choir.*
10. **Can a choir sing at a pastoral service, then? (e.g. a wedding or funeral).**

*There are no weddings currently permitted.*

**Numbers are strictly limited at funerals.** *Legislation states explicit numbers, but government guidance needs also to be considered. The crucial factor is to look at the spirit of what is intended – to minimise the numbers of people and staff interacting. So, a vicar and organist, for example, might need to be there, as work (and therefore not part of the limit of numbers), to enable the service; but other music groups and choirs should be kept to an absolute minimum, follow local risk assessment, and be able to be defended by the officiant that their presence is reasonably **necessary**.*

11. **What do we need to do about music copies?** *Copies should not be shared, and should be ready in place before singers arrive. Anyone issuing the music should ensure they have used hand sanitiser before handling copies. Alternatively, singers can use their own, pre-supplied copies or digital music on iPads or Tablets.*

12. **Can we use choir robes?** *Yes. Robes should be taken home by choir members following their first visit back to church after lockdown, and brought back as required. If they have not been used since lockdown started there is no need to wash. Robes should not be shared.*

**Additional note:** *The name of the game here is to have thought through all your steps to safe return carefully. The RSCM guidance is predicated on perhaps smaller premises and the need to make sure that the whole choir is not entering a small space and hanging robes at the same time. As long as you have thought all these things through carefully and listed rationally on your own risk assessment then there is potentially no need to take robes home.*

13. **What about masks?** *All choir members should wear masks on arrival and departure from church (though Government guidance does not require children under the age of 11 to wear a mask). As members contributing to the leading of worship, they may remove masks to sing. Masks may be removed in rehearsal, as long as social distancing is complied with.*

14. **What about visors?** *Not specifically necessary nor helpful.*

15. **What (additional) protection does the conductor need?** *Where the conductor stands is important; and should not be too close to the singers in a face-to-face configuration.*

16. **Can we use the choir stalls?** *Stalls should only be used if the choir can be appropriately distanced; choirs should aim to sing in a wide semi-circle if at all possible, and certainly to avoid singing directly face-to-face.*

17. **Can we process in church?** *This should be avoided at present*

18. **Can the congregation sing?** *No – not yet.*

19. **What instruments can we use in worship?** *There are no specific restrictions, but social distancing must be adhered to.*

20. Government guidance says: **'Any instrument played during worship should be cleaned thoroughly before and after use'**. **What does this mean?** *Keyboard instruments: the keys, stops, switches and access doors should all be cleaned with suitable wipes. Drum kits should be cleaned also; and in all cases if the player changes during a rehearsal or service, cleaning MUST take place.*

For other, personal instruments, normal hygiene should be observed. Please see the following Guidance from Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts>

21. **Can music group singers share microphones?** *Within a performance, no. If there is space, condenser microphones will be capable of picking up multiple performers. But*

*personal, vocalist-type microphones should not be shared. Microphones of this nature are very difficult to clean, but leaving set aside for 72 hours would then enable subsequent usage by someone else.*

22. Government guidance says: 'Except for the limited circumstances outlined above, people should avoid singing, shouting, raising voices and/or playing music at a volume that makes normal conversation difficult or that may encourage shouting. This is because of the potential for increased risk of transmission from aerosol and droplets.'  
**So can the organ play a loud voluntary?** *The solution to this is partly in choice of repertoire, but also in encouraging congregations to engage with, and listen to the voluntary before and after services. Duration of voluntaries is thus an important factor.*
23. **Are Visiting Choirs welcome at Cathedrals and Greater Churches?** *Not during this lockdown period.*
24. **Can an Officiant sing (at Evensong for example)?** *Yes, as long as they adhere to all protocols associated with choir members (eg Track and Trace record keeping)*
25. **Where do I find the risk assessment materials?** *See these links:*  
<http://www.rscm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Risk-assessment-introduction.pdf>  
<http://www.rscm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Risk-assessment-template.pdf>

**General, positive pointers to consider in making your plans and completing your risk assessment (see separate page for draft examples):**

- Extra consideration should be given to those people at higher risk.
- You should not compel people back at this point: work with the needs of your own musicians, with the appropriate pastoral sensitivity (and, where necessary, respect for confidentiality)
- Hand sanitisers should be available as a minimum at entrances and exit points.
- Registers need to be kept, which must be robust enough to be used as part of a 'track and trace' exercise.
- Singers should supply their own water/no shared refreshments
- If possible, the entrance and exits should be separate.
- If possible, arrival and departure times of choir members/musicians should be staggered, to maintain social distancing.
- Supply a clear indication to your musicians as to what appropriate distancing looks like – e.g. with suitable floor markers.
- Make sure you are aware of 'Covid-secure' plans and protocols for the administration of First Aid in your church.
- Rehearsals should be organised to be as short as reasonable, and spaced appropriately.
- Improve ventilation to a space as far as possible. Consider holding rehearsals in e.g. the main body of the church or parish hall, rather than a modestly-sized rehearsal room (as part of your risk assessment). Modify (ie, reduce) the number of musicians if the spaces are insufficient.